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"Perfect Through Suffering."

A

THANKSGIVING SERMON.

BY REV. L. MERRILL MILLER.

DELIVERED AT THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

OGDENSBURGH, N. Y.,

A. M.

THURSDAY ~~NOVEMBER 28~~ NOV. 28, 1861.

Published by Request.

OGDENSBURGH:

ADVANCE STEAM PRINTING HOUSE, WATER STREET.

1861.

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A THANKSGIVING SERMON.

BY REV. L. MERRILL MILLER.

"PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERINGS."—Heb. ii. 10.

Ought we to keep our accustomed festival of Thanksgiving this year? Some of our singers, under the pressure of the times, refuse to chant "Hail Columbia! Happy Land," "Rejoicing in Tribulation" is, to be sure, an Apostolic injunction, and has solid gospel argumentation to support it. But was not that written for Christians considered only in their religious character and when personally chastened before God? How shall we, as citizens of a commonwealth, filled with the alarms of war and all the perils of civil strife, regard such a call to joy and thanksgiving? What key-note shall we strike on our harp-strings, and what shall be the melody? "A dirge!" perhaps more than one is ready to reply. Thoughts and questions like these presented themselves, doubtless, to most persons when

the public press announced the proclamation of our Governor, calling us to renew this time-honored annual visit to the House of the Lord, and bring offerings of adoration and praise to His name, "because "His merciful kindness is great toward us."

But surely these were *only* first impressions. Removed as we are—in the Providence of God—so far from the scenes and immediate results of strife and surrounded by so large a degree with the fruits of the field and the blessings of health and social life—exempted from internal disorder—favored with liberty of conscience

and the uninterrupted pursuits of ordinary life—with our national rights respected—partizan animosities fast burning out, and the spirit of fraternal kindness more largely developed all around us, certainly we have the most earnest and substantial reasons for gratitude and praise. These are signal mercies which could not have been anticipated in the midst of a sovereign State whose highest interests are linked with the destinies of our glorious Union, and whose rights are represented by a hundred thousand of her brave sons upon the tented field. With scrupulous sincerity and gladness, therefore, should we celebrate the day, 1st. For the actual enjoyment it brings, and 2d, for the lessons of true satisfaction suggested in connection with the text for our country in the future. I. We have actual blessings for which we should be truly thankful. They are admirably summed up in the Proclamation of our Governor. This day, designed at first as an expression of gratitude to God for the abundant harvests of the year, has especial demands upon our notice at the present time. We offer to the world an astonishing spectacle. We are not only able to feed our armies and the people at large, but have stores in abundance above these demands to supply, to a great extent, the wants of other nations. For these supplies they are willing and anxious to be at peace with us. During the last

week in October, no less than 1,477,546 bushels of grain and 83,524 barrels of flour were exported to Europe, bringing back two and a quarter millions of dollars. For one week in September, the amount exported reached the sum of three millions of dollars in value. It is susceptible of definite proof that we must receive for our cereals alone within the present fiscal year, more money from Europe than we have heretofore received for both food and cotton, and that supposing we shall not this year sell one pound of cotton to the foreign market, we shall yet have a large balance in our favor, which will be payable in specie. It is therefore impossible for us to estimate the *political value* of the produce of our fertile fields in the present hour of national danger. Aside from the justice of our cause, these potential reasons appeal to the interests of England and France to be at peace with us. If these nations did not stand at our doors to ask for bread, little can we tell of the combinations that might have entangled our political relations. God be praised for our overflowing granaries for exemption from hunger at home and the fear of enemies abroad!

Again: Such has been the nature of this unholy rebellion, that its bitterest fruits and heaviest calamities have been confined to the soil that gave birth to traitors and that now cherishes them.—The people of the Northern States ought not to overlook this kind interposition of God toward them to-day. Not a single hostile soldier treads upon their soil. We hear of all the ravages and miseries of war, but they have not come nigh unto us. Fearful sadness, and dismay, and distress brood over ravaged hamlets—ruined towns—fields where harvests have been snatched off by hungry soldiers, and even cities where life is stagnant and the waiting masses are wistfully casting about

for deliverance and for bread. Here quiet citizens are not on the watch lest invasion or the uprising of suspected slaves should imperil their homes and their safety. No mother with anguished heart clasps her little one to her arms and runs for their lives. These painful sights and sad experiences are removed far away from us. For His great and undeserved goodness to us we should give Him most humble and hearty thanks.

II. We also find cause for Thanksgiving from considerations growing out of the text, for our country in the future.—To be made perfect through suffering is a doctrine of Christianity which is as surprising as any of the wonderful results embraced in its mysteries; and yet it is one made quite familiar to those who are acquainted with the Scriptures. The Apostle says: "It became him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." This Captain is the Lord Jesus Christ. He was made fully qualified for his works by his remarkable sufferings. As applied to the Saviour, it does not mean that he was made holy, or was fitted by them to be a better man—but he was by this sorrowful experience made a Saviour just adapted to redeem man. By his sorrows he was completely endowed for the mission he came to accomplish. He thus became a *perfect* model of bearing affliction to all who, as his disciples, shall be called to suffer. He became, also, by his experience, able perfectly to sympathize with his people and adequately to succor them. He also, in his sufferings, completed his great atonement for transgressions, and hence, as he hung upon the cross, in all the agonies of death, he could triumphantly say of all the work given him to do, "It is finished." It is perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Thus was the Saviour the highest, holiest and best of all that ever lived,

"Made perfect through suffering." We now have such an assurance as we could not otherwise have had that he was a perfect Saviour—not only in moral character, but in his work and in his adapt-
edness to the wants and circumstances of man.

The principle of the text finds a different but striking illustration in the experience of men disciplined by suffering. When afflictions accomplish their intended work, men are made better by them, and through them are qualified for greater and more extended usefulness. Seasons of trial are times of preparation. Hence we constantly meet with passages of God's Word which teach us that God will discipline men for their profit—will perfect them through suffering. He often chooses his especial servants in the furnace of affliction. He prepared Joseph for his great work in Egypt by his trying experience, and Moses for his lofty position as the leader of Israel by his long and severe training away from home and in the solitudes of Sinai. Peter and Paul were directed to important duties, for which their trials eminently qualified them. Luther was eminently fitted for his great mission as the leader of the Reformation, by the peculiar sufferings and experience in which he was tried, himself, passing through the different phases of his great public work in his own private life. The severe labors of Washington in his early days, as a surveyor and as a soldier in the border strife, as well as his home education, were eminently times of preparation for his subsequent brilliant career as the leader of the federal arms and as the Father of his Country. Many a man has been tutored into sobriety, and honesty, and economy, and thrift, and earnest, holy endeavor, and wide-spread useful-

ness, in the school of Adversity. By his fall, and mortification, and self-induced wants, he has been sharpened into self-dependence, and honest determination, and patient endurance, toiling up the hill and onward to competency, and honor, and peace. God often uses these instrumentalities for the highest good of his people. So he says to his afflicted ones, "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit." "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest." The faith of Abraham, the meekness of Moses, the patience of Job, the submission of David, and the constancy of Daniel, were the happy fruits of their great and singular sufferings. And men whose praise has from the beginning been prominent for goodness and usefulness, have been peculiarly lifted above the world by the heavy pressure of afflictions. As gold is cast into the furnace to increase its purity, so God refines his chosen ones in the fiery ordeals through which they often pass. Hence his way song runs—

"Trials must and will befall;
But with humble faith to see
Love inscribed upon them all,
This is happiness to me."

However dull may be his pupils, God has ways to lead each one of them to the best knowledge and most desirable ends. But he more frequently teaches them effectually through sorrows and trials than in any other way. He makes them *perfect through sufferings* for His will and glory.

We proceed a step farther, and observe that God also instructs nations, and leads them to perfect their destiny through sufferings. The periods of their greatest prosperity have been their times of greatest danger. The iron age of Rome was the era of her true glory. Then she exhibited her courage manhood and virtue in the highest degree. She was not then tainted or enervated as afterwards by the excess of her subsequent

prosperity and wide-spread luxury and indulgence, but compelled to economize at home and struggle abroad; forced to maintain integrity and honor as the basis of her treatment of her citizens and soldiers, and enemies as well as conquered subjects; she inculcated and practised a surrender of self to the public good; and by love of country and adoration of the household Penates, and praise of the manly virtues, encouraged the spirit and formed the legions that subdued the world. In those days were found heroes who could come from captivity on parole, advise their countrymen against peace, and then go back to torture and certain death; or heroes like the Decii, who could devote themselves to solemn self-sacrifice, and could bid sublime defiance to pain, and count dishonor the only evil. It was then that the fire called eternal burned at the capital, and was tended constantly by the vestal virgins, as a type and symbol of the duration of the Republic. It implied that the duration of Rome was co-extensive with the preservation of her purity of morals. So long as the dignity of her matrons and her virgins remained unsullied, so long she would last—no longer. Female chastity guarded the eternal city. Her progress was onward to conquest and greatness until the presence of luxury and indulgence undermined her virtue and integrity, and she gradually lost her courage, and enterprise, and empire.

Consider our past prosperity as a nation. Call to mind the evils which excess and indulgence were rapidly inducing among us. How long, think you, before such a life of wealth, and luxury, and indulgence, would sweep us all into the vortex of one common imbecility and ruin?

The rise of England, from the days of the conquest of Julius Agricola, when

the Roman arts and improvements were first introduced into Brittany, and the Druidical superstition received its death-blow at the Isle of Man, has been marked by severe revolutions and wars of invasion. The arbitrary and despotic powers of the crown were wrested away, and the liberties of the people enlarged by popular disturbances or appeals to arms and changes of thrones and dynasties. The trial by jury, and the important concessions of Magna Charta, were wrested from John at the cannon's mouth. In the same manner, Charles the First was compelled to sign the Petition of Rights and Charles the Second the Act of Habeas Corpus, which gave the utmost possible security to personal liberty. While, therefore, revolution and war are to be deprecated as great evils and heavy judgments, by our *proper conduct* under them and God's blessing, they may be sources of great advantage and increased usefulness and happiness. This agrees with the teaching of God's word, "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." This was the effect of divine chastenment on the Jewish nation in the wilderness, "When he slew them then they sought him." This was the experience of Manasseh and his people, "And the Lord spake to Manasseh and to his people, but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem, into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the

Lord he was God." And since God oftener instructs men in a time of adversity than in the midst of ease, and luxury and enjoyment, they have really more reason to fear prosperity than adversity. Because we have no fear of enjoying ease, health and affection, we forget that there are evils which flow naturally and generally from prosperity, corrupting the very basis of all society and affecting the entire machinery of the commonwealth, and at the same time overlook the checks, and balances, and benefits which flow from social disappointments and public chastisement. While we ought to be more concerned in prosperity to be thankful than to enjoy it, so in adversity we should be more anxious about *conducting ourselves aright* under its pressure than even to avoid its heavy inflictions.

The principle of the text, viewed in this light, has been verified in our past history, and we believe will be more fully in our present trials and deliverance. Suffering in a common and noble cause banded our forefathers together when on British soil and in the friendly keeping of Holland. Suffering for conscience sake made them a peculiar class of men, and while it led them to God with intense devotion, and solemn awe, and unquestioning trust, it cast out all fear of man and superstitious regard for the assumptions of crowned heads and titled dignities. It led them to protest against all encroachments upon human rights, and to maintain firm resistance to tyranny. At length, despairing of justice at home, in the spirit of holy devotion and lofty self-consecration, they bade adieu to all the endearments of fatherland, braved the perils of the deep, and gave themselves to the task of establishing, in this far distant, inhospitable land, an asylum for the oppressed and a home for the free.

Glad and hopeful in their sufferings for such an object—

"Amidst the storm they sang:
And the stars heard, and the sea!
And the sounding aisles of the dim woods rang
To the anthem of the free!

Aye, call it holy ground,
The soil where first they trod!
'They have left unstained what there they found—
Freedom to worship God!'"

Another lesson through suffering awaited them, even beyond the struggles for subsistence and against the cruelties of Indian warfare. It was the long endured bitterness of oppression and resistance of the dearest rights of representation that at length united the infant colonies in one common protest and declaration of grievances. Failing here, they were compelled to form a confederacy for the mutual defence, and appeal to arms. Providence had great designs for them, and led them along, step by step, until they were compelled to go farther than their first intentions, and to declare their Independence. After the long struggle of the Revolutionary War, St. George's Cross drooped to the Stars and Stripes, and the thirteen original States took their places as a new nation among the nations of the earth. We had, however, hardly started on our career as the United States, before the breaking of the bonds which held these States together was manifest. The States claimed rights which nullified the General Government, and shipwreck was threatened in the outset. Soon, however, impelled by the necessities of the case, a convention came together for the purpose of forming a more perfect union among the States and consolidating the General Government for all the purposes of self-preservation and efficiency. That convention formed the Constitution under which, and by the blessing of God, we have so largely prospered and magically increased in power, and wealth, and happiness, until the introduction of the doctrine of secession and

this great rebellion to aid and enforce it. The first statesmen of the land have echoed the voice of the noble defender of the Constitution, "The Union must and shall be preserved," "Liberty and Union now and forever, one and inseparable." One statesman and his ever-restless constituents cried out, "*Nullification*," but the entire voice of the other States and their strong arm uplifted by the hero of New Orleans, speedily warned them back to duty and to silence. Since that time, until quite recently, declarations of attachment and devotion to the Union have been earnest, emphatic, and constantly repeated. With one voice we have said in those eloquent words, "Our path of duty is straight onward; and it is as clearly defined to the view as the milky girdle of the heavens in a cloudless night. We must stand by the Constitution of our country. We must stand by the laws of our country, indignantly frowning upon all sentiments or utterances of revolutionary violence. We must stand by the rulers of our country, honoring them as the ministers of God to us for good. We must stand by the union of our country, regarding it as the spring of our blessings, the palladium of our freedom, the sheet anchor of our felicity, and the star of hope to the oppressed and downtrodden nations. Let us transmit these principles to our children as we received them from our fathers, entire and untainted, to be by them in like manner, under the shield of the national banner, handed down to theirs as a precious and perpetual inheritance."

The war of 1812 was also made the source of blessing and gain to the nation. We gained increased respect and deference for our name abroad, and secured honorable advantages for our limited but growing commerce.

And yet again shall we emerge from

the sufferings of this war, made more perfect for the blessings and purposes of our existence as a nation. This will appear, if we call to mind the first effect of this war. It is a development of our character. We are now sure of a nationality. We have been regarded hitherto more for what we might become—more as a doubtful experiment, than as a true and successful nation. The suspense of the memorable week in last April was fearful. But since the shameful attack on Fort Sumter, we have arisen to new discoveries and importance. The protesting voice of twenty-three millions of people, and the hastening of thousands of volunteers to arms and to Washington, proclaimed us a nation in fact, with the mighty sinews of aggression and defence. Pure patriotism, one of the noblest springs of national life and honor, flourishes under our Republican institutions. And the spectacle of more than half a million of volunteers rushing into the field in eight months, without a single conscript, is an unparalleled wonder in the history of all nations. The offer of money, and sympathy, and life, in behalf of this government, shows its grand hold of the hearts and affections of this great people, and that they value above all earthly considerations its Constitution, and laws, and free institutions, which have been, under God, the *Ægis* of our protection and the spring of prosperity and our future hope. We ought not to forget, in our thanksgivings to-day, that God has taught us that we have a noble land, and that patriotism keeps march with its greatness and prosperity.

Another advantage of this war is in the fact that we discover the feelings of other nations. We are taught their disposition toward us; what we have to expect from them, and how we are to deal with them. It has been a source of

surprise and mortification to us to witness the apparent attitude of England, and the mode in which she speaks of our faults and weakness. It has been equally a surprise and pleasure to grasp the outstretched hand of Russia. In misfortune we learn the position in which we stand and the means by which we must perish or arise to greater honor and power. The false friends are exposed, and those upon whom we may truly lean are clearly declared. This war becomes a great blessing, so far as it points out definitely our relations to other nations, and teaches how we must deal with them in adverse circumstances.

Our national sufferings have developed an unexpected degree of variety and wealth in our resources. Notwithstanding eight months' most costly preparations and expenditures in war, the Federal Government and the loyal States find themselves to-day in a far better financial position than at the beginning of the year. We have more specie on hand by one hundred millions of dollars than we had at this time last year.

An arrangement has just been completed by the Associated Banks of New-York to take the third fifty million instalment for the Government by the 1st of January next, the previous one hundred millions having already been taken.

The traffic on Northern Railroads has incalculably increased. The amount of Canal Tolls is nearly one million of dollars more than last year. Our expenditures for foreign manufactured goods has decreased and domestic manufactures enlarged. While the imports since the first of January last are one hundred millions less than for the same period last year at New-York alone, the *exports* are thirty millions more. These figures are for ten months, so that, adding to these items the one above respecting the specie, we may, in round numbers, call the whole gain for the year two hundred millions of dollars.

This is a problem for those to solve who deluded themselves with the idea that the stoppage of cotton exportations would precipitate the North into bankruptcy and overturn our entire commercial interests. The scheme which was to prove our financial ruin has been made an element of prosperity to us.

We shall, too, learn more distinctly just what we need, as a people, to consolidate and make us a greater and better nation. God has been lifting us up to higher and better views than mere accumulation or selfish indulgence. He is calling us back to the simple principles upon which we were founded as a religious nation, and by which our prosperity has been hitherto augmented and made a blessing. We see clearly that righteousness alone can exalt a nation, and that we can place no dependence upon demagogues, or mere political creeds or administrations, but must rely, under God, upon the intelligence and virtue of the masses, whose elevation and real good must be sought in the body politic. Offences must needs come, but God can, and, we believe, is making these great evils of war a blessing to us in teaching us these important lessons. He is correcting our ostentatious extravagance, our selfishness and effeminacy. He is leading us to see that God is just, as well as merciful, and that he is a judge, as well as a Father, will punish the wickedness of a people, and will avenge the cries of the poor and needy. And as God has given us peculiar reasons in all our past history to believe that we are his people, so we must expect from his love, and his gracious designs to us, and for us, in the future he will chastise us for our sins, open our ears to instruction, and prepare us for greater usefulness and knowledge.

A war can never again be inaugurated on secession grounds, and, we believe, never again, either for or against slavery. It would seem as one of the blessings of this war that God was about to cut the Gordian knot that has so long bound us to difficulties and danger, and solve the problem of slavery, a fruitful source of the bitterness and crimes that have vexed the body politic. Our forefathers began the War of the Revolution because they were compelled to it in self defence. At its close God crowned them with independence, a far greater blessing than they at first sought. This war was imposed upon us. We did not seek it. We were driven to it for our very *existence* as a nation. Our existence! This was the only rallying cry that roused our thousands and hundreds of thousands, and marshalled them for battle. That existence, under God, we shall preserve, and exalt, and purify, for a higher and holier des-

tiny among the hundreds of the earth.
And new light seems faintly streaming
upon the vexed question of slavery. God
grant that his own light may lead us in
the way of duty in regard to it, and that
in his own time, not far distant, the Stars
and Stripes may float over this entire na-
tion, black and white, rejoicing in the
light, and singing the anthems of the
free.

In view of such facts and thoughts as
these, while we sorrow over the evils of
this fratricidal strife, have we not abun-
dant reason to rejoice and give thanks to
God that his mercy is still over us, and
that amidst the din of war we can see
rising up to meet us the bright shadows
of glorious and happy events, coming on
to bless us with a greater prosperity and
a more secure and blessed heritage? Let
us, then, this day lift up our voice in
prayer and gladness for this land of the
free and home of the brave. Let us in
those noble poetic strains shout

UNION AND LIBERTY.

Flag of the heroes who left us their glory,
Borne through their battle-fields⁵ thunder and
flame,
Blazoned in song and illumined in story,
Wave o'er us all who inherit their fame!
Up with our banner bright,
Sprinkled with starry light,
Spread its fair emblems from mountain to shore,
While through the sounding sky
Loud rings the nation's cry—
Union and Liberty! One evermore!

Light of our firmament, guide of our nation,
Pride of her children, and honored afar,
Let the wide beams of thy full constellation,
Scatter each cloud that would darken a star!

Empire unsceptered! what foe shall assail thee,
Bearing the standard of liberty's van?
Think not the God of thy fathers shall fail thee,
Striving with men for the birthright of man!

Yet if, by madness and treachery blighted,
Dawns the dark hour when the sword thou must
draw,
Then, with the arms of thy millions united,
Smite the bold traitors to freedom and law!

Lord of the Universe! shield us and guide us,
Trusting Thee always, through shadow and sun!
Thou hast united us: who shall divide us?
Keep us, oh! keep us, the many in one!
Up with our banner bright,
Sprinkled with starry light,
Spread its fair emblems from mountain to shore!
While through the sounding sky,

Loud rings the nation's cry—
Union and Liberty! one evermore!

Let us not to-day fail to remember our
absent ones in the tented field and on the
borders of strife. Let us encourage our
hearts with the memory of their patriot-
ism, and as we look at their vacant places,
thank God that he gave them a heart and
the courage to go, and invoke his bene-
diction and blessing for them.

If God has taken any of the absent ones
from the field of glory, let us hope that
their Thanksgiving is purer, and sweeter,
and more jubilant than ours can be. Let
us believe that they look down with lov-
ing eyes upon our feast; and so let us
turn again to what is left of life, in tran-
quil submission, and so work and wait
until our change comes.

Let us not forget to-day that victory
belongs to God. Thank God to-day that
we have an army! Thank God to-day
that we have a navy! Thank Him that
we have heard glad tidings from them!
His arm hath gotten us the victory. Not
unto us—not unto us, but unto His name
be the glory given, for His mercy and His
truth's sake.

Let us not forget the poor in our enjoy-
ments to-day. As we turn to partake of
our good things, let us remember the
Lord's charge: "The poor⁶ ye have al-
ways with you. Inasmuch as ye have
done it unto one of these, (my disciples,)
ye have done it unto me. Go your ways;
eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send
portions unto those for whom nothing is
prepared. This day is holy unto the
Lord, neither be ye sorry, for the joy of
the Lord is your strength. Jehovah is
the God of this nation, and even through
sufferings will he make us perfect to ac-
complish his mission for us in our greater
usefulness, prosperity and happiness.
Amen.





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